

# Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2002

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## Swift Parrot Survey

The Swift Parrot survey is on again on the weekend of 25-26 May. CFNC will be conducting our part of the survey on Saturday 25, leaving the Octopus (opposite the Castle Motel) at 8am. Margaret Badminton (ph. 5473 4555) is co-ordinating. Remember - the more teams to go out, the better the coverage, the better the survey. Bring binocs, lunch if you are continuing through the afternoon, drinks and snacks. If the afternoon only suits, meet at the Quince Tree off Pullens Road at 12.30pm. Unsure where that is? Ring Margaret.

## Decline of Birds in the Local Bushland Part 2

In the Castlemaine Naturalist of April, 1990 (#155), I wrote an article *Where have the birds gone?*. In the article, I reported on a meeting between members of the Castlemaine, Bendigo and Castlemaine Field Naturalists Clubs, to consider whether or not there has been a serious decline in bird numbers of the district.

Some of those present could recollect "a Jacky Winter and White Face on every second fence post", and "around Maryborough, there used to be a group (of Babblers) every hundred metres or so, and now the groups are widely spaced", and "...some residents of Bendigo complained about the noise from Blue-faced Honeyeaters in the street trees, and urged that the street trees be removed, to abate the nuisance of these birds. The Blue-faced Honeyeater is no longer to be found in the Bendigo streets, and a sighting of a few a few years ago brought bird watchers from afar."

It was thought that the bird populations had reduced considerably since the 1939-45 war, and there had been a further dramatic decline during the 1980s, when the number of birds had dropped to perhaps a fifth. In May 1992, I wrote an article for the Castlemaine Naturalist (#178) giving the number of times species had been recorded in my lists made over 1991, for a total of 52 outings. It is interesting to compare these with figures for 2001 (from my lists and those from Margaret Badminton and Rita Mills), a total of 77 lists. The figures in these tables are % occurrence for the year.

|                           | <u>1991</u> | <u>2001</u> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Flame Robin               | 18          | 8           |
| Hooded Robin              | 8           | 1           |
| Scarlet Robin             | 29          | 17          |
| Jacky Winter              | 25          | 4           |
| Golden Whistler           | 14          | 15          |
| Rufous Whistler           | 27          | 18          |
| Yellow-rump Thornbill     | 46          | 14          |
| Yellow (Little) Thornbill | 10          | 8           |
| Buff -rump Thornbill      | 25          | 20          |
| Brown Treecreeper         | 19          | 14          |
| Weebill                   | 21          | 10          |
| Willie Wagtail            | 62          | 27          |
| Restless Flycatcher       | 23          | 12          |
| White-eared Honeyeater    | 25          | 15          |
| Red-browed Firetail       | 33          | 12          |

Figures were not compiled for the larger birds. Other birds showed little change, or the figures were too small to make comparison meaningful. Care should be taken in comparing the figures for 1991 and 2001, as the lists were not matched for time of year, place of excursion, or the observer(s). However, the results support the belief that some birds have declined over the past ten years, and that not all species are affected.

It is interesting to note the absence of Whiteface on the list, and the recording of Jacky Winters in only 4% of the lists. "A Jacky Winter and White Face on every second fence" is certainly far from what we have today.

The Readers Digest *Complete Book of Australian Birds* gives some other names for the White-browed Babbler, including "Apostle Bird" and "Twelve Apostles". It is many years since I have seen that many birds in a local group.

Ern Perkins

#### FNC/U3A Bird Observers

The Bird Observers Group began afresh on Anzac Day. The weather forecast looked dismal, but the rain seemed to have stopped shortly before the 8.30 am starting time. A small group set out for Barker's Creek reservoir between showers. The next two hours provided almost ideal conditions and a good variety of birds.

A lone Pelican greeted us and there seemed to be quite a number of water birds waiting to be identified. Chris Morris had gone home to collect a telescope, which proved most useful for this purpose. Apart from the usual ducks, there were several Musk Duck, which were close enough to pick out their distinguishing features. But then a similar, but much smaller duck

appeared, which was identified as a Blue-billed Duck. Five of these nomadic ducks were present and we were able to identify both the male and female through the telescope.

Several Great Crested Grebe were present, providing good views. Also present were several rafts of the smaller grebe. Significant discussion took place as to whether these were Australasian or Hoary-headed Grebe and after some debate we decided to come back in the springtime when identification would be much easier!



Back at the cars we examined some of the many lorikeets which were attracted in very large numbers to the local orchards. The various deterrents being used seemed to make little difference to them! We had good views of the Musk Lorikeets and decided to leave the others until next time!

Some 32 different species were seen in a two hour session and they were seen well enough for beginners in the group to get a good look. This should make things much easier when they are next encountered. All in all it proved a very pleasant and informative morning and more members are encouraged to come along next time. Rita Mills will be running the next excursion. Members are encouraged to come along on the fourth Thursday of every month at 8.30am at the Octopus. The intention is that each outing will be run for beginners, we will leave the difficult birds for much later! For further details phone Rita Mills 5472 4553 or Nigel Harland 5474 8246

Nigel Harland.

### **“Under Control”**

Notes from the Newsletter of the Keith Turnbull Research Institute

- On Jan 29 a fly, parasitic on the Elm Leaf Beetle was released by Minister Sherryl Garbutt near the Melbourne Botanic Gardens.
- Weed inaction by landholders targeted by Dept of NRE. Fines imposed leading to greater degree of compliance.
- Hay contractor fined for selling hay containing Patersons Curse.
- Fines imposed for failure to act on Ragwort and Serrated Tussock.
- Is biological control of Willows possible? Six species of Willow are invasive, but the difficulty would be to find an agent which did not affect Weeping Willows.
- Controls for Bridal Creeper becoming established, a leafhopper and a rust.
- A South African mite may turn out to be a suitable control agent for Boneseed following trials for host specificity.

- Another control agent for Gorse. The Gorse Pod Moth is newly arrived from New Zealand where it has been extensively tested.
- The Horehound Clearwing Moth was released in Wyperfeld in 1997 and appears to have become established.
- Fire Ant identity cards are proving successful in assisting the public to identify fresh outbreaks of this serious threat.
- Pierce's Disease has the potential to destroy grapevines. It is a bacterial disease which has devastated vineyards in the U.S.A., especially in California. The consequences of anyone illegally importing grapevines or plant material into Australia could be catastrophic.
- A gene has been produced by CSIRO which could cause a target fish such as Carp to produce fewer daughters, thus leading to a diminution of the population.

Contributed, George Broadway

### Birds of the Eyre Peninsular

(or - "Our Only Definite I.D. of the Birds of the Eyre Peninsular!")

We are pleased to report two sightings of the Rock Parrot on our recent trip to the lower Eyre peninsular at Avoid Bay, accessible from Coffin Bay National Park, and at the Theakstones Crevasse at the turn around point of Whalers Bay (south of Port Lincoln). The pairs of parrots were seen during the afternoon feeding amongst the low growing coastal plants that thrive in those limestone areas.

The dramatic coastal cliffs from Venus Bay to Port Lincoln are mainly granite outcrops capped with limestone deposits.

The Sea Lion colony at Point Labbatt and the New Zealand Fur Seal colony at Cape Wills kept out attention for some time.

John and Nina Cole

### Land Clearing Rates Worse

Further to the recent article on the newsletter on bird decline we read that recent research using more accurate techniques of measuring vegetation loss has revealed that land clearing rates are 22 per cent higher than earlier estimates, with the equivalent of 50 'football fields' of vegetation cleared every hour. On these figures Australia now ranks number 5 in the world in land clearing rates. It is hardly surprising then that people want to see the Box-Ironbark forests fully protected.

A recent address to the Australian Ornithological Conference presented a 'what if' scenario suggesting that Australia may lose up to half of its endemic bird species, with most becoming ecologically extinct before then. It was argued that, rather than requiring focused local action, or specific regional attention, we may need to re-evaluate our priorities for the

continent, such as retiring agricultural land on a massive scale, giving landholders realistic compensation and even re-examining our park-based approach to conservation. It had to be recognised by all that there is no 'quick fix' and it is only by every organization and individual doing their part that our woodland birds have any chance of being conserved.

Chris Morris

### Rally for our Forests, Saturday May 18,

Batman Park, Cr. Flinders and Spencer Sts., City at 11 am

"Momentum is gathering for an end to logging old growth and other high conservation value forests. In the lead up to the next Victoria election the Bracks government will be making critical decisions on whether to protect or destroy old growth forests, Box-Ironbark forests, and water catchments such as Goolengook, the Otways, Melbourne's water catchments and the Wombat forests. There has never been critical time for Victoria's forests."

(Organised by the Wilderness Society, Environment Victoria, ACF, VNPA, Friends of the Earth and 15 rural environmental groups. )

### Bathing Lorikeets

A little after 7am on Wed. 10/4 there was a tremendous noise of lorikeets in the trees around our house at 118 Blakeley Road. Still in my dressing gown I went out to investigate, and found the treetops alive with movement, and many flocks of ten to twenty birds taking flight and landing amongst the foliage again. There was nothing obviously in flower, and I couldn't make out what they were doing until I got my binoculars, and found that they were actually bathing in the water in the leaves from the rain-shower earlier. They would rub and scrabble among the leaves, perch momentarily on a twig and shake their feathers, and then do it all again before flying to another tree and starting again, and round and round they went.

They finally settled in pairs and set about preening and grooming to finish these boisterous ablutions.

I happened to spot a lone Red Wattlebird, cowering on a branch, wondering what on earth was going on I'm sure. It certainly wasn't game do anything about the hoards until they began to thin out a bit, and even then it only showed itself, flew a couple of half-hearted sorties, called a couple of times and let it go at that! Even the Galahs seemed a little stunned.

Most of the birds were Musk Lorikeets, I managed to identify one Purple-crowed, and going by size, I think there were Little among them, but the light at that time wasn't bright enough to get a good look, despite the numbers - and of course, being lorikeets, they didn't stay in one place for any length of time.

Rita Mills

Going to Melbourne? There is a not-to-be-missed exhibition of Celia Rosser's Banksia paintings at the State Library in the Keith Murdoch Gallery until Sunday June 30, 10am-5pm daily, except public holidays. Enter from Swanson St. (And it's free!)

### Observations

- A visitor to the meeting told of a Magpie, near his home in the Dandenong area, which thinks it's a Lyrebird. It was heard mimicking a Grey Thrush, a Grey Currawong and other birds. He commented that in 45 years of bird watching this was the first time he had experienced this behaviour in Magpies.
- Hans and Anne van Gemert have had an Echidna on their new property. It is quite a large one, and was not at all concerned by their presence.
- Doug Ralph woke one night recently to the sound of a Powerful Owl calling on his property in Galway Street. He thinks it might have been passing through because he hasn't heard it again.
- Geraldine Harris reported that Red-browed Finches are back on their property after an absence of some years.
- Stan Bruton commented on the Spider Mite which seems to be spreading on the Gorse on Golden Point Road.
- Craig Moody said that the Spider Mite that had been released at Glenhope is making only slow progress, but on their own property one of the plants is smothered in web.
- Stuart Morris has commented that the big Red Gum at Guildford is worth a visit to see the huge graft in some of the large upper branches. Grafts are fairly common in Red Gums and can be quite spectacular.
- George Broadway reported that the pair Boobook Owls are back in the Gardens, and had been there for several weeks. Shirley Parnaby first saw them on March 4.
- Reports that the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are back in Chewton have come from Lorraine Rye and Barbara Maund.
- Chris Morris found a Whistling Kite and Brown Falcon in the valley above Barkers Creek Reservoir. He commented that there seems to be fewer raptors now there are more houses in the area.
- Peggy Munroe is the envy of many a birdo at the moment, as she has a Chestnut-banded Rail in her garden. It first appeared on the morning of Saturday 13/4.
- Ern Perkins reported seeing Parsons Bands *Eriochilus cuculatus* in Kalimna Park on 27/4/02.
- Eileen Courtney from Maryborough FNC sent this letter : "Re Sugar Gliders in Daylight hours (CN March and April).

"On an afternoon excursion in the Fells Gully area during March 1976, members of our club (including Lyle and I) were thrilled to see a Sugar Glider gliding. After making several stops it disappeared from our view some 150 metres away. Another interesting aspect was that it had taken off from the side of a tree as we approached, so it was out and about before we intruded on its territory.

## FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING 26/4/02

Re planning permit on block adjacent to Mararet Badminton's block behind the Golf Course - see Hans van Gemert's article.

The last **Roadside Cleanup** had to be cancelled due to weather conditions. **Another is planned for Saturday May 18 at 8.30am.** The committee felt that there should be a regular plan if the Cleanup has to be cancelled for any reason, and a regular alternative given. If the Cleanup doesn't go ahead on the 18th it will be held on Monday May 20 at 9.30am. As always, wear suitable clothing and footwear. Gloves, rubbish bags and red jackets are provided, but grocery bags are handy and convenient to carry and dump, when filled, into the larger bags.

Hans van Gemert has offered to store the **roadsides signs** in his shed in Golf Links Road.

**Needed - ideas** about how to keep **permanent records** of birds, plants, etc. For bird records, Ern Perkins suggestion is that we keep separate records of each area we stop at, and the time, names of members recording, and numbers, not just species. This will allow comparisons in years to come.

**Welcome** to new members, Maree Murrell and Bill Davies.

## **Remnant Vegetation on Private Land and Planning Permits**

Anyone who has followed the debate on the Box-Ironbark Forests and has seen the recent reports will be aware of the degree of degradation and fragmentation that has occurred since European settlement. The recently completed study only dealt with public land but some important areas of remnant vegetation are on private land. One of these is in the Muckleford area, adjacent to the Castlemaine Golf Course and in close proximity to the Muckleford State Forest. I was therefore dismayed to find a statutory notice on a fence near where we now live announcing that a Planning Permit has been applied for to build a house on a 6 ha block of land in Erin Court, Muckleford. After perusing the application documents at the Shire Office it became clear that a number of trees are in serious danger. Permission is being sought to remove 9 trees for the house and the septic tank, but the plan also shows a 70 m driveway and the plan refers to an unspecified number of ancillary buildings. No indication is given on how many trees might be affected by these.

The area generally including this block is a known roosting site for the Swift Parrot. Members of our Club have been monitoring the Swift Parrot for some years and its endangered status is now well documented. At the April business meeting the Committee decided to write to the Shire Council to remind them of the importance of protecting both the remnant vegetation and threatened species such as the Swift Parrot when deciding on this planning application. Several members of the Club have lodged individual objections.

Hans van Gemert

## CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST MAY 2002 PROGRAM

**General Meetings** are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

**Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. **Also note** that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

**Business Meetings** are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

### VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Wed. May 8. at Bendigo FNC. Peter Johnston and Paul Gullan speaking on the **Box/Ironbark Living Records Project.** 7.30pm, Elderly Citizens, Golden Square.

Fri. May 10 Bats. The speaker is Lindy Lumsden of DNRE. UCA hall at 8pm.

Sat. May 11. **Ted Errey Walk, Brisbane Ranges.** All day excursion. The walk is an 8km circuit with 2 very steep sections, and you will need to carry your lunch and drinks. We will be starting from the Stony Creek Picnic Ground, which is an interesting area, so there's plenty to do if you don't want to walk. Take morning and afternoon tea, lunch, wear sturdy footwear and suitable clothing. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 9am.

Sat May 18. **Roadside Cleanup.** Meet at Tait's Carriages at 8.30am. Details p.7

**If wet or foggy** , deferred to -

Mon. May 20., 9.30am

Thurs May 23 **Combined FNC/U3A Birdwatching.** Meet at the Octopus 8.30am. Leader Rita Mills

Fri. June 14 **Surveying in the Box Ironbark Forests** with Garry Cheers of Maryborough FNC. UCA hall at 8pm.

Sat. June 15 **Fungi** excursion to Bullarto Res. *or* a visit to the Moody property, depending on the availability of fungi. Leave Chirp, Mostyn at 1.30pm.

Fri. July 12 **Reptiles.** The speaker is Darren Green of Bendigo. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat July 13, **Moody Property or Fungi at Bullarto Res.** - see June 9

Wed Aug. 14. Broom Pull at the Butterfly area of the Botanic Gardens. 9am start. Details later.

**NB** - The dates of the meeting and excursion in June are the 14th and 15th not as I had it earlier! Ed.

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**Disclaimer** - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

**2002 Committee** E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.), ph. 5472 2513, H. van Gemert (treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Badminton, G. Harris, B. Maund, M. Oliver, R. Piesse.

**Subscriptions for 2002** Ordinary Membership: Single \$22 Family, \$30

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Supporting: \$31

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